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# Know Your SCHOOL

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## Know Your School Child

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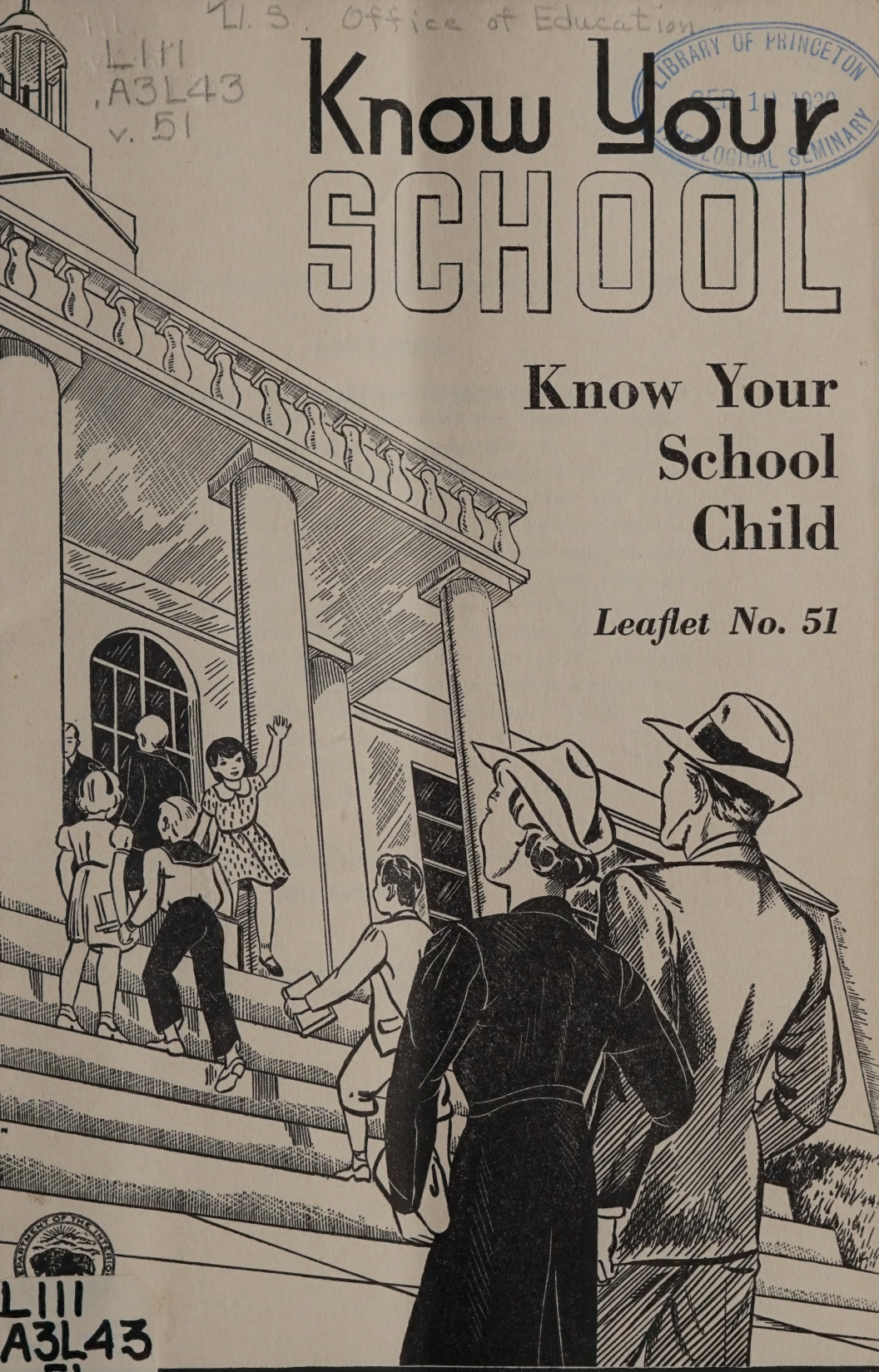

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United States Department of the Interior • *Office of Education*

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## FOREWORD

The Office of Education, at the request of the American Association of University Women last year, began the preparation of a series of study outlines for the use of the local branches of that organization. Four outlines in mimeographed form were issued at intervals during the year. They met with such good response not only by the American Association of University Women but by other organizations interested in studying the public-school system that the supply was soon exhausted. In view of the continuing interest, the Office of Education has decided to have the outlines printed as a series of leaflets under the general heading "Know Your School." The titles of the outlines already prepared are "Know Your Board of Education," "Know Your Superintendent," "Know Your School Principal," "Know Your Teacher," and "Know Your School Child." Other outlines in the series will be issued at intervals this year.

BESS GOODYKOONTZ,
*Assistant Commissioner of Education.*

# KNOW YOUR SCHOOL CHILD

By

MARY DABNEY DAVIS

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"For every child, understanding * * *" are the beginning words of one of the first principles in the Children's Charter. And why? Because every child is different from all others. He is an individual personality with a background of experiences, with abilities, interests, attitudes, strengths, weaknesses, and needs that are peculiarly his own. He acts from different motives, learns in different ways and at different rates, accomplishes different ends, and uses his learnings in different ways than his associates. Every year finds him a little different. For he is a growing personality, surprising his parents and teachers from time to time with new abilities, new patterns of behavior, new motives, and new ambitions.

The major problem of the school is to understand each child, to define his needs, and to organize learning programs in such a way that he will gain the greatest possible good from his experiences. Understanding implies knowledge of his physical condition, his social development, his emotional behavior, and his general ability. It involves knowledge, also, of each child's special interests and talents, of his defects and learning difficulties, and of the nature of his growth process. The problem is restricted to no single grade level. Elementary and secondary school teachers alike must be able to detect differences among children of the same age or in the same grade, and to observe the changes that take place within the same child from year to year. In judging the effectiveness of the school one needs to discover how intimately the school understands each pupil,

and to what extent it modifies its aims and procedures to meet individual needs.

In the following pages are presented some of the questions concerning individual characteristics that are important for teachers and parents to consider in planning or evaluating a modern program of child guidance and training. They are intended to serve as a starting point for the study of the school child. A few suggestions for investigation and discussion are presented as well as references for reading and study.

## PHYSICAL CONDITION

### *What Should Be Known About a Child's Physical Condition?*

One of the most obvious characteristics of a child is his physical condition—his size, weight, and vigor; his apparent strength; the degree of healthy glow of his skin and hair; and the sparkle of his eye. These all tell stories of nutrition and sleep, of habits of personal hygiene, and of the degree of confidence and security a child feels at home and among friends. A close relationship exists between his physical condition and his emotional and mental well-being. This relationship makes the protection of a child's growth and development a major concern for both home and school.

For pounds of weight and inches of height there are certain general standards which have been developed from measurements of thousands of children. Wide variations from these standards and a general estimate of muscle tone and vitality may indicate lack of care or some fault of hygiene which requires correction for a child's healthy physical condition. But there are no set patterns for the health of boys and girls in general or for the physical welfare of children at any stated age level. Certain observations can be made, however, which provide more or less reliable estimates of physical growth and development at different age levels.

Within the general age range of from 2 to 6 or 7 years marked changes occur in proportions of the body; control of bodily functions is acquired; and the coordination of large muscles is developed rapidly. Provided with

adequate amounts and proper kinds of food, with restful sleep, opportunity to play, regularity of daily routine, and moral support, the young child leaves the dependent period of infancy well equipped to enter a period of developing physical self-dependence. Within certain limits he can walk, run, skip, jump, push, pull, hang, swing, climb, or pedal, and he can manage paint brushes, crayons and scissors, sand and clay, brush and dustpan. Since children at this age grow much faster in size than in strength, care needs to be given to the duration of strenuous play and to the demands imposed by muscular tension.

From 6 or 7 years to 10 years—"middle" childhood—there is relatively slow growth. But "late" childhood—up to the thirteenth or fourteenth year—is characterized again by rapid growth. Adolescence or youth constitutes the last period extending from about the fourteenth year to the adult period. Characteristic changes in height and weight, in body proportions, and in organic maturation occur at the same time as emotional, social, and mental adjustments, and a fairly close relationship between the two types of development has been observed. Competitive sports, outdoor play, accomplishments in dancing and gymnastics, tests of physical prowess and endurance are of special interest. Guidance is needed to assure a fair balance in the program of physical, social, and mental activity and to protect a boy or girl from excess and strain in any one of them.

Differences in physique which have been mentioned become more marked in children at these older ages. An illustration used in a current report from a superintendent of schools shows three boys of junior high school age. One is tall and thin, another middle-sized and overly plump, and the third is short and apparently of average weight for his height. Such variations at any age level are to be expected. The phrase "average weight for his height" indicates that differences exist in all types of growth with individual children and supports the statement of a well-known physician that there is no such thing as "a normal child." There are many causes for these individual differences that merit careful considera-

tion—possible inheritance of structure, influences of nutrition, and of the human and material elements of environment. Whether thick or thin, long or short, every child should be kept at his best and frequent stock taking of the factors affecting his physical condition can profitably be made. The supply of food, the balanced ration, and the conditions under which food is eaten; exercise and sleep; sunshine and fresh air are basic factors. Just as basic are the conditions which make a child happy, poised, and enthusiastic or which result in worry, anxiety, tension, and the feeling of insecurity.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What elements would you include in a check list for observing the physical growth and development of a child 2 to 9 years of age? From 9 to 14 and from 15 to 18?
2. Compare your child's height and weight with the norms reproduced in the references and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such comparison.
3. Normal growth requires care and protection. What does this mean in terms of nutrition, clothing, rest, and play at different age levels?
4. A dentist reports that John's first teeth are in bad condition and asks permission to fill them rather than pull them.

   An upper-grade teacher reports that Anne lacks energy, is listless and unable to concentrate, and tires easily during the school day.

   Discuss wise procedures to follow in each case.
5. What part do playgrounds, backyard play areas, and recreational centers play in the guidance of healthful growth and development? Survey your community for these facilities. Plan a program to extend play facilities if such are needed.
6. What protective measures for the health of children and youth are included in your State laws?
7. What health services are available for boys and girls in the elementary and high schools?

8. What lessons are advised for children in matters of health? What are the danger points of overemphasis and of superstitions?

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## EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

### *What is the Nature of the Child's Emotional Behavior?*

This question may be approached in several ways. In the first place, a number of bodily changes may be observed as indications of emotional response. In a state of fear, pain, or anger, the heart beats faster, breathing is deeper and more rapid, blood pressure increases, the mouth becomes dry, digestive activity decreases, the pupils of the eye dilate, and certain other changes occur, some of which are not readily noticeable to an observer. In a young child, emotional excitement may lead to refusal of food, vomiting, and other digestive upsets.

A second way of studying emotions is by noting the child's overt behavior—crying, stiffening the body, holding the breath, trembling, throwing himself on the

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floor, and other "negative" reactions in the case of anger, pain, or fear; and certain "positive" reactions in the case of pleasure, joy, and contentment. Although the "positive" reactions are less objectively defined, they manifest themselves in such attitudes as acceptance, acquiescence, relaxation, and agreeableness. Overt behavior is common in the early years of a child's life, but it is soon supplemented by verbal objections or abuses, threats, name-calling, arguing, blustering, and the like. This use of language normally supplants the more primitive, physical type of emotional response.

By adolescence, the mental aspect of the emotion is a prominent feature. Now the child, like the adult, no longer makes obvious, direct responses unless deeply aroused. Instead, he may talk about fear, anger, love, pain, and joy. Or he may resort to some kind of substitute mechanism that allows him to evade the emotional condition altogether. In studying emotional responses at this level, one must go beyond the mere observation of bodily changes and overt behavior to an understanding of the child's report of his emotions or to an analysis of his compensations, his "sour-grape" attitudes, his daydreams, and his other escapes from reality.

Every teacher and parent, as well, must learn to recognize not only the obvious types of emotional behavior, but also the indirect symptoms of emotional stress that the child often tries to hide. For emotions are intimately related with general well-being—happiness or misery, ease or difficulty of learning, normal or arrested development. Whether the child's emotional life evolves normally depends, to a large degree, upon whether he is understood by parents and teachers, and provided by them with security, a stable environment, and opportunities for progressive emotional growth.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Make a list of a child's fears and superstitions that have their origin in his lack of understanding of the world in which he lives. What are their implications for teachers and parents?

2. Discuss the wisdom of laughing at a child's fear of the dark. How would you combat such a fear?
3. Why do we no longer subscribe to the theory of correcting undesirable behavior by "breaking the child's will?"
4. How would you go about training a child who is shy and uncommunicative at school or in the presence of strangers?
5. One psychologist states that "every child should be encouraged to develop an *active* attitude when faced with an unsolved situation." Apply this principle in as many ways as you can to the development of desirable emotional behavior.
6. Discuss the effect of current literature and movies on the emotions of high-school pupils.
7. Describe the kind of objective attitude a teacher or parent should take toward a child's temper tantrums, expression of jealousy, extreme manifestations of affection, and feelings of inferiority.
8. Observe the emotional responses of a particular child and identify those that are normal for his age and those which show evidences of arrested development.
9. List the various types of "escape mechanisms" that one may use in a difficult emotional situation. Compare the beneficial and harmful effects of their use.

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## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### *What Should be Known About a Child's Social Development?*

A child is born into a world of human beings of which he is, for a time, completely unconscious. But this state does not last long. Within a few weeks he smiles at the sight of an adult, turns his head at the sound of a human voice, and social awareness has begun. From now on his social behavior may be studied from either of two points of view. According to the first, we look upon the developmental side, observing how his social attitudes change with the total growth process. The second recognizes the various types of social behavior that he manifests at any one stage of development. Both aspects are important in understanding how far a child has progressed socially, and what type of social behavior he is exhibiting, and hence in determining whether he is socially adjusted or maladjusted.

At preschool age, the child is extremely self-centered, laying claim to whatever pleases him, making imperative demands of "give me" and "take me," boasting of *my* daddy and *my* mama, and taking as his plane of reference "my," "mine," and "me." This supreme interest in self is normally superseded in the elementary school by an interest in others of his own age and he may become a member of a "gang," organized for a purpose, and provided with leader, password, and established rules of conduct. Not infrequently "gang" associations arise out of a desire for physical activity, adventure, and large accomplishments, as well as social contacts.

With adolescence, "gang" loyalties wane and devotions of personal friendships are born. At first, the child devotes himself to a member of the same sex,

wearing the same kind of clothes and the same style of coiffure, exchanging confidences with autographs, and enjoying, like Emmy Lou, the role of the "nintimate" friend. Later, his love and loyalty are transferred to a member of the opposite sex and he approaches the broad social goals of adulthood.

Throughout the child's development, his social behavior as manifested in different situations may be of several types. He may be *socially blind*, that is, indifferent to the presence of others; *socially dependent*, that is, deeply impressed by the presence of others; or *socially independent*, in which case he is aware of others, but is neither inspired nor inhibited by them. In terms of his group contacts, he may act the role of *protector* to a child less assertive than himself, as *devotee* to one upon whom the group centers its attention, as *leader* or as *follower* of the group.

Yet these patterns of social behavior are not constant. Nor are the child's social relations always harmonious and satisfying. Teachers and parents cannot fail to observe the conflicts that arise among children of all age levels, although these conflicts occur with less frequency as children grow older and learn better how to get along with others. The child who is socially maladjusted may merely show in a greatly exaggerated form the types of social behavior that the normal child manifests in less exaggerated form. Or he may behave in a manner altogether appropriate for a child younger than himself but quite inappropriate for one of his stage of development, while again his behavior may represent a deviation from what is socially accepted at any age. Since the school aims to guide social behavior, teachers must be able to observe signs of maladjustment, to study their causes, and to plan a preventive or a remedial program.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Observe the social behavior of children of different ages. Make a list of the signs of social adjustment and of social maladjustment that you observe. Suggest possible

explanations for the maladjustments and the ways by which they may be overcome.

2. Jane, aged 10, objects to playing with other children, preferring instead, to shop or to make calls with her mother. How would you go about correcting this social difficulty?
3. Why does the "only child" sometimes prove to be socially difficult?
4. Twelve-year-old Ted has an exaggerated idea of his own importance, insisting on "being first," blaming others for his own misfortunes, and doing things to attract attention. What explanations can you suggest for this behavior, and how would you go about correcting it?
5. Studies show that girls' and boys' play activities wane at the onset of puberty. Should this fact be interpreted as evidence of antisocial tendencies? Or are there other explanations? What are the implications of this fact for teachers?
6. What value can you see in "group disapproval" as a means of improving a child's unsocial behavior? What is the danger in using this device indiscriminately?
7. How may the nursery school and kindergarten contribute to a child's social adjustment? Discuss also the value of summer camps, school parties, Boy Scout and similar organizations as means of adjustment.

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## GENERAL MENTAL ABILITY

### *What Is a Child's Status in Regard to Mental Ability?*

Even the most casual observer of school children can distinguish those that are "bright" from those that are "dull." But there are degrees of brightness and dullness, and it is important for the teacher of the modern school to know fairly accurately where a child's general ability can be classified. For the modern school aims to promote the best development of each child through an enriched curriculum, broad learning experiences, and a varied assortment of materials. This aim can be met only by fitting learning activities to each child's mental ability. Although no test has yet been devised to give an accurate measure of mental ability, a variety of tests of sensory discrimination, attention, memory, judgment, reasoning, and other mental functions indicate the adaptability of the child and his learning possibilities with considerable accuracy.

The results of these tests are usually stated in terms of the child's mental age (M. A.), or as an intelligence quotient (I. Q.), which is obtained by dividing his mental age by his age in years and months. For example, a child of 10 years may show a mental age of 12 years. His development is therefore interpreted as being advanced 2 years beyond expectancy, and the acceleration is indicated by an intelligence quotient of 120. An intelligence quotient of 90 to 110 is considered average development, while one below 90 is considered less than normal and one above 110 as superior ability. Although the I. Q. gives some clue to a child's degree of brightness, it must be used judiciously. In the first place, a child of high intelligence may lack the ability to stick to a task long enough to gain under-

standing, whereas another child of only average intelligence may possess an emotional drive and an eagerness to learn that greatly enhance his learnings. Furthermore, since many of the tests require verbal facility, it is possible for a child of meager social background to fail to show his true ability on such tests. Repeated measurement is therefore needed to check on test results. The danger of overemphasis on an intelligence test is shown by the White House Conference Report in the following statements:

> A single simplified mental rating becomes misleading unless interpreted in terms of the child's total individuality and his previous developmental career. * * * The estimate of the individual's make-up and his growth process should be determined by a series of examinations. * * * After all, it is not the status at a given moment, but the growth characteristics of the individual career which are important from the standpoint of child health and protection.

The more we can find out about the child the better able we are to know how he is growing mentally, and how his capacity to do a particular thing increases from year to year. Growth curves based upon results from mental tests show that mental growth is very rapid for the preschool child, and that the rate of development is slower thereafter, although development does not completely cease before physical maturity has been reached. What has been called "the flowering of intelligence" depends upon opportunities provided by the home and the school for the outlet of each child's abilities and for their progressive development.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Who has the better opportunity to judge correctly a child's general mental ability, his teachers or his parents? How can you justify your answer?
2. Why is it necessary to recognize a child's mental limitations as well as his mental possibilities when planning learning experiences?
3. What kinds of opportunities should the home and the school provide for developing a child's general mental ability?

4. The average high-school student has a good memory but is not fond of using it, and good powers of concentration when a subject interests him. How may these characteristics affect the measurement of his mental ability? What are their implications for parents and teachers?
5. Whether a competition should be encouraged in the school is a matter of frequent debate. Discuss this issue objectively.
6. Is there any reason why "dull" children should be socially or emotionally different from others? Does the development of social competence present a different problem for "bright" and "dull" children?
7. Do you believe that a child's high score on a test of general mental ability should reflect credit on his parents, or that his failure should reflect discredit?

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## SPECIAL ABILITIES

### *What Account Should Be Taken of a Child's Special Abilities?*

A complete account of a child's abilities does not end with the results of an intelligence test. For we know that children differ not only in general mental ability, which the intelligence test aims to measure, but in certain

special abilities. A gifted child, that is, one with a high I. Q., may fall below average in music, in drawing, and in mechanical manipulation. Sometimes, although less frequently, he may show a special defect in learning to read, to spell, or to use numbers. Conversely, a child who is below normal in general mental ability may show remarkable talent in a special field.

This does not mean that a bright child is likely to rank low in special aptitudes and a dull child to rank high. It rather means that either child may rank anywhere in respect to music, drawing, and mechanical aptitude, for they are related little, if at all, to general mental ability. However, what a child accomplishes as a result of a special talent frequently depends upon his intellectual status; for example, while ability to represent objects by drawing is practically independent of general intelligence, success in symbolic drawing and caricature can be attained only by persons with superior intelligence as well as with a high degree of special talent. Similarly, whereas persons of low intelligence have proved to be arithmetical prodigies, the ability to solve problems, to think in symbolic terms, and to master higher mathematics is not found in stupid persons.

Less has been done by way of testing for special abilities than for general mental ability. In some cases they may be measured by tests in the school subject, as in reading, spelling, and arithmetic. Again, symptoms of unusual abilities may be readily recognized in the child who learns to read early, who perceives musical sounds, creates musical compositions, draws accurately, and shows mechanical ingenuity. Such special tests as are available for identifying and measuring special abilities do not provide means of classifying a child at 8 years or 10 years of age in ability in music, or in any other special field.

Public schools are likely to pay more attention to the child who shows a special defect in reading, arithmetic, music, and drawing than to the child who shows unusual talent or precocity. Clearly, neither should be treated like an average child, but should be provided through a

differentiated curriculum, with the kind of training that will give him the greatest benefit. While musical sensitivity, for example, probably cannot be increased by training, achievement depends upon training inborn capacities to the fullest realization.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Make a report on some lightning calculator whom you know or have read about.
2. Study family resemblances in musical talent.
3. Discuss the statement that "neglected handicaps breed antisocial beings."
4. Discuss the question of compensation of talents and defects, as implied by such old proverbs as "Every dog has his day," "Slow but sure," "Homely in the cradle, handsome at the table," "A cold hand, a warm heart."
5. What danger is there in rating a child's general ability by his special gifts in music, dramatics, art, etc.?

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## INFLUENCES OR CAUSES OF INDIVIDUAL TRAITS

### *What Influences or Causes Individual Traits?*

"What makes a child what he is?" is a complex question to answer. It involves equipment provided by his parents, characteristics which may be attributed to sex, race, age, and influences of all kinds from the human, material, and spiritual elements in his environment. Attempts to attribute characteristics to any one source are bound to fail. This is due to the interrelationships among all the influences upon a child's growth and development and to the lack of uniformity among individuals. Some of the influences may be reviewed briefly:

*Heredity and environment.*—Through his ancestry a child receives traits from many hundreds of individuals and he constitutes, then, a new combination of hereditary traits. The nature of the environment in which he lives, however, determines to a large extent what traits he expresses and the amount and quality of his expression of them. Among current studies of the effects of environment upon children's growth and development one indicates that children living in improved housing conditions gain more in height and weight within a year than do children living in congested areas; another reports that material surroundings have less influence in shaping a child's personality than do the good health of parents, their care of the home and their active interest in the children's activities and playmates; and other studies indicate that the rating of mental abilities for children in adopted homes are more closely related to that of foster parents than of own parents.

*Sex.*—Girls develop a little earlier than do boys and reach full maturity about 2 years in advance of them. In specific skills, girls usually walk and talk earlier than boys, while to boys are attributed greater physical strength, more skillful motor control, slightly better problem-solving ability and a wider range of information. Available measurements of intelligence and

school achievement, however, show but slight differences between the sexes.

*Race.*—On the whole, differences in the average performance of races have been shown to be slight with differences being far greater among individuals within the races. It is found difficult to provide adequate tests for peoples of different origins and to secure for study, groups of people which may be considered representative of the various countries.

*Age.*—Some of the characteristics of children at different age levels have been indicated in early discussions. These have been concerned with different aspects of growth and suggest not only obvious differences in physical growth but the less tangible influences of age upon individuality in social and emotional life.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways is it possible for a home to provide a satisfactory environment for adults but be a poor one for children?
2. Cite illustrations of the attitudes of adults that have helped to shape a child emotionally in either a positive or a negative direction.
3. What are some of the effects upon the development of boys and girls which may result from guidance in the use of leisure time; reading, listening to the radio, attending concerts and art exhibits, hobbies, trips to the country?
4. Noon rest and lunch at school under careful supervision seem to contribute to the well-being of primary school children in some localities as indicated by less restlessness and inattention. What would such a program involve in your local school?
5. Using as a guide the community survey outline listed among the references, build a plan for studying in your neighborhood, in your district or city the factors and facilities which influence the social attitudes, physical welfare, and mental stimulus of boys and girls.

6. What types of home records can be kept by parents and children to aid the development of desirable habits and attitudes, the increase of vocabularies, the widening of interests, and the deepening of understandings?

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